

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Anthony Vierra

"I never regretted working for Pioneer Mill. And I only wish, if they were still available, people, the younger workers, would be able to work for them. . . . It's up to the individual if you want to learn and you want to advance yourself. . . . You want to work in the mill, there's welding, there's electrical work, there's everything you can think of in the mill. And there's carpenter shop, there's tractor shop, mechanical shop. You name it, the plantation had. . . . And sometimes it depends on the individual, too. . . . Sometimes when you doing a mistake or don't like take orders and stuff like that, sometimes you deprive yourself of learning little bit more."

Anthony Vierra was born in 1926 in the Pioneer Mill Company plantation camp of Lunaville. He was the seventh of nine children born to Frank Vierra and Julia Moniz Vierra. Frank was a Pioneer Mill Company employee, serving primarily as a water *luna*.

Vierra attended Sacred Hearts School in Lahaina, then attended St. Anthony School, from which he graduated in 1944. After a stint in the U.S. Army, Vierra went to O'ahu and was employed at the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard. In 1950, he returned to West Maui and began working for Pioneer Mill Company, first as a *luna* for a *wahine pulapula* gang, then, eventually, as a cane-haul-truck driver. He earned \$1.47 an hour working the night shift.

In 1961, Vierra left Pioneer Mill for a job with the State Parks Department. He remained there until his retirement in 1989.

He lives in Lahaina. He and his wife, Gertrude, raised seven children.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Anthony Vierra (AV)

Lahaina, Maui

January 30, 2003

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Anthony Vierra for the Pioneer Mill oral history project on January 30, 2003. We're at his home in Lahaina, Maui. And the interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Anthony. We can start. First question is, when and where were you born?

AV: Born in Lahaina, 1926.

WN: What part of Lahaina?

AV: I was born in Pioneer Mill Hospital, (which was then located on Front Street in the area now known as Lahaina Center. I grew up in Lunaville, Lahaina). They used to have a hospital in Lahaina.

WN: Why did they call it "Lunaville"?

AV: It was a camp, consists mostly of all *lunas*. That's why they call it "Lunaville." In other words, all the bosses, all the people that was living in there, were mostly all supervisors.

WN: So was your father a *luna*?

AV: Yeah. My father originally was a water *luna* and then the manager took him into the office and he became paymaster for the office, in charge of the Pioneer Mill [Company] payroll.

WN: So he was like a bookkeeper?

AV: Yeah. Bookkeeper. Those days you did everything. Bookkeeper and, I think, I could be wrong but at one time they claimed that he was in charge of the office. And maybe those days the office was mostly payroll, I guess, yeah. Paying people. You know, lot of sugar workers, the irrigators especially, they worked on a contractual basis, raising the sugarcane. They were paid according to their crops. In other words, if the tonnage per acre was higher than normal, they got raises. So it was an incentive for the irrigators to sort of do more to make more tonnage per acre.

WN: So these were like independent contractors?

AV: Yeah.

WN: They had their own plot to take care of?

AV: Yeah. Their own fields.

WN: They got paid according to how much they . . .

AV: No. They were paid the regular [hourly] salary. But then they were given a percentage of the tonnage that they—if they had eighty tons per acre, they got so much money. If they had ninety tons, they [got] paid [more]. So in other words, above a certain amount of tonnage, they were paid extra amount. That's an incentive for the irrigators to concentrate more on the fields and take better care of the crop, in other words.

WN: So they got a set amount plus extra?

AV: Extra, yeah. So all of these things were added work for the office managers. And they [sugar workers] were paid when the fields were harvested, then they took an estimation of how many tons per acre. They can tell when they take it to the mill, scale the cane. They could tell how much cane [was produced] per acre. And the average tonnage usually before used to be about 80 tons. And it went right up to sometimes 120 tons, 130 tons per acre. So the contractor who was irrigating those fields, he made a good percentage from the average 80 tons to 120 tons or 130 tons.

WN: So they get paid this percentage only periodically then?

AV: Yeah. Harvesting were every two years. They had what we call a twenty-four-month crop. In other words, after they plant the field it takes twenty-four months before they harvest. And like in Lahaina in those days, didn't have too much equipment so there was a lot of stones and stuff. So the irrigator, many times, the water couldn't get to certain crops because of stones or something. So the irrigator had to do a lot more extra work to build different dams to make the water reach the canes so that your crop would be more [i.e., higher yield] per acre.

WN: So tell me about your mother.

AV: My mother was born in (Hana. Sometime in her late teens, she moved to Lahaina and lived with her Aunt Mary Medeiros. She helped with household chores, until she met my father, and later married him.)

WN: So your mother was Portuguese?

AV: Portuguese.

WN: Your father was Portuguese?

AV: My father, Portuguese.

WN: So they never told you how they met?

AV: Right. Yeah. I don't know how they met but it's surprising. My dad's parents came from Portugal and they ended up in the valley of Kaua'ula. There is still a [outdoor] bread oven there. My father had. . . . Joe Vierra was a brother. He was in charge of the

experiment station for Pioneer Mill. Then he had another brother, John Vierra was the water *luna*. And Manuel Vierra was another water *luna*. And there was Alfred, I think, was a water *luna*, too. So they all ended up being water *lunas*. Water *lunas* is people in charge of the irrigators who maintain the irrigating of the fields. And they had different sections.

In Lahaina sections, they had just like from one mountain area—we had ditches going across the fields—and from the mountain to one ditch, above that was all the A-fields. And then the next ditch was down the B-fields. The next ditch was the C-fields. So they started off with the A-B-C-D-E-F and they started going. And when they came to the Lahaina section, they still went with the alphabets, but A-1, A-2, A-3, to change, yeah, the different. And as they went further towards Wailuku way, at one time, Olowalu had their own plantation. And I think eventually, I wasn't around when that happened, but when I started work it was all under the Pioneer Mill.

WN: Right.

AV: But originally, I think, Pioneer Mill bought Olowalu Sugar [Company in 1931] and combined [i.e., merged] it to Pioneer Mill. And from the Olowalu section was all the O-fields, O-1, O-2, O-3, all the way until field twenty-nine. Twenty-nine is close to the *pali* there. And we who worked for Pioneer Mill or anybody familiar with plantation, our orders—we had a bulletin board below the mill where we report to work every morning. And there was a big blackboard telling you where you was to report to work the next day. And it was all recorded according to fields. So if you knew the fields, you just knew where you had to go. You know, O-1 means Olowalu and A-1 is up here, and L-A is Lahainaluna and all these different locations. It sounds very complicated, but once you know it and sort of learn it, it becomes very simple.

WN: So you said that your father and all his brothers were *lunas*. What about their father?

AV: My dad's father, when they came from Portugal, they were all old already. And of course, I think as their family grew before the plantation started, I think they passed away already. You know, my father's father. And then of course, all his sons—you know, the Portuguese had a policy that, it's something like the Japanese style where the oldest brother just like becomes the boss if the father dies. So my uncle Manuel was the oldest and it's like he took care of all the rest of the brothers. They all work, then they give the money to him. Like he manages the support of their families and stuff until they got married. Once they get married, then they go on their own. So in my father's case, my uncle Manuel was the oldest—my father and them were all young men. From the stories that I've heard from my mother and them, my dad and them were under my uncle.

WN: How many years apart was your uncle from your dad?

AV: *Shee*, my uncle Manuel was maybe fifteen years difference, I think. The oldest to the youngest. My dad was one of the younger ones in comparison to, there were Charlie, there were John and Alfred, you know, number of others.

WN: I'm just wondering, you said, they were all *lunas*, but once you start working, they became a *luna*? Or did they have to work out in the fields?

AV: I think because they were here before the sugar company started, they knew how to talk Hawaiian, maybe not fluently but enough to communicate with the people. And when the

plantation started, these Portuguese people were, as I said, here long enough and they were hired by the plantations to be bosses because they could communicate with the foreign people who came to work. Like maybe the Chinese, Filipinos, and . . .

WN: Japanese.

AV: Yeah. For the bosses to communicate with these supervisors would be easier than, you know, when they brought in the Koreans, the Filipinos, the Japanese, many of those people couldn't speak English, so the [supervisors] couldn't converse with them.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

So because my dad and his family lived here long enough, the bosses could converse with them and this is why most of the time they became leaders. Throughout the Hawaiian Islands as a whole, Wailuku Sugar, HC&S [Hawaiian Commercial & Sugar Company], almost every place they had almost all Portuguese water *lunas*. And I think the particular reason for that was they were here way prior to the sugar companies opening up. And once they opened up, the bosses could communicate with these people who were here long enough, could speak English better than the people who they brought in to work for the sugar companies.

WN: So what was growing up in Lunaville like?

AV: Growing up in Lunaville was very—I don't know how I should say it—but was very good living. Because they were all *lunas* and bosses and whatnot, they had good houses. If their houses needed repairs and stuff like that, being *lunas*, they had more like first priority. So they took very good care of the houses. And Lunaville was right above [Lahaina] town.

WN: Yeah, where was Lunaville?

AV: Lunaville was where the prison was, Prison Street, if you went straight up.

WN: Straight *mauka*?

AV: Straight *mauka*, past Honoapi'ilani [Highway], you would get to Lunaville.

WN: You said near the [present] Lahaina Aquatic Center?

AV: Yeah, but before the Lahaina Aquatic Center, there was a village they call Lahaina Pump [Camp, a.k.a., Waive'e Camp]. They had couple of pumps there that were pumping water for the upper lands. They called it "Lahaina Pump." But they had housing, one section was Japanese section, one section was Filipino section. In the beginning, when you went into the camp, there was a huge house, the entrance was just like the camp boss. And my uncle Joe was living in that house. So just like he was the—if any problem arises in the camp like that, they run to him, and he in turn gets in touch with everybody else. He was in charge of the experiment station after a while, Joe Vierra. But I would say Lahaina Pump had maybe about five-, six-hundred people. And Lunaville, we had maybe about fifteen houses at the most. Our house was between Lahaina Pump on the [Lahaina] Aquatic Center side, and then the office and the mill was just a little ways off from Lunaville. So Lunaville was in between Lahaina Pump and the mill. And the Pioneer Mill office was right above the mill. So my dad used to walk to work on the ditch. (Chuckles)

- WN: So when you say fifteen houses, many of them were [occupied] by your father and his brothers.
- AV: Yeah, my dad had one, my uncle Manuel had one, my uncle John had one, so there were about four Vierras in those houses. And then, of course, there was a few water *lunas*. Manuel Nunes was one of them, and the garage foreman, Walter Book, was one of them.
- WN: So ethnic-wise, would you say it was mostly Portuguese [living in] Lunaville?
- AV: Yeah, mostly Portuguese, with a few exceptions. After a while, one Filipino was brought in, Baroso. He was in charge of the Filipinos who were cutting cane by hand. He was in charge of them. And we had a Japanese fellow by the name of—or two Japanese fellows. Hiraoka was in charge of the experiment station in the office, Joe Hiraoka. And Kurita was in charge of the mill lab department. So between Joe Hiraoka and Kurita, and of course, as I said, Baroso came in, the rest was all the family, Portuguese, and whatnot.
- WN: And when you say that the houses in Lunaville were better than say the Lahaina Pump [Camp] houses, what do you mean? You mean bigger?
- AV: Yeah. The houses were---you know, like our home for example. Not all the houses were like that, but some of them were four-bedroom houses and were built with a living room, and a kitchen. The Lahaina Pump houses were built camp-style kind. They had no bathrooms in the house. They had a community bathhouse. And they had community bathrooms where you had to walk down, and there was eight or ten toilets that you had to use. But the Lunaville houses were built all with bathrooms in it. So I would say . . .
- WN: You had flush toilets?
- AV: Yeah. I mean, little more luxury in comparison to the camp people.
- WN: Were the houses constructed better or anything like that?
- AV: Yeah, the Lunaville houses were mostly T&G [tongue-and-groove] and the Lahaina Pump houses were built more with one-by-twelves, the vast majority of them. I mean there's a number that was built later on, but, as I say, I don't know whether this was true originally or it changed after a number of years. You know, when I grew up, my dad had nine children and I'm one of the lower ones (WN chuckles) so maybe as time went by, when the houses were first built maybe they weren't all like that. But, as I say, when I remember growing up, our houses were all in good shape. And I would presume that it was more or less like that from the original time.
- WN: So what did you do to have good fun growing up over there?
- AV: We spent most of our time elsewhere (WN laughs), like going down to Lahaina Pump, going into town. There was a railroad track right below our house. We used to walk on the railroad track coming to Dickenson Street, which is where the Catholic school is now. Once you in Dickenson Street, you walk to town. But those days, the plantations had plenty activities.
- I don't know if they started with it way back, but in my time they had athletic directors within the plantation. Peter Sequeira was one of them, and David-something. And Kameo Ichimura. They were all in charge of the athletic programs. They had athletics in all of the different camps throughout the plantation. And they had all these sporting activities

throughout the year. Like they had softball, and baseball, and basketball, and volleyball. They had these different camps competing with each other, like Pu'ukoli'i, which was above the Kā'anapali area. Then they had Waihi-kuli Camp up here, and they had Lahaina Pump. So within the plantation's scope, they had these intramural sports: basketball, volleyball, whatever the sports was.

Eldredge was the fellow's name, David Eldredge. Peter Sequeira, David Eldredge, and Kameo Ichimura, I think his name was. But they were in charge.

Every camp used to have their basketball courts, volleyball courts, and stuff like that. And these athletic directors that I mentioned, they had station wagons that the plantation provided them. And sometimes we used to compete with Wailuku, Kahului, Makawao, CYO [Catholic Youth Organization] clubs, and stuff like that. So as far as activities, sporting activities, they were well provided by the plantations. And those were the most important things because those days not very much other things were going on, you know what I mean. But they provided all of the sporting activities.

WN: What about things like gardens, did you folks have?

AV: Gardens, yeah. Every camp had a section in their area where they could raise whatever vegetables they want to raise. Everybody participated in that because, what I mean is, those days whatever vegetables you can raise, that much less you have to buy. In the stores, it wasn't available most of the time because the demand—everybody raised their own. Like Pu'ukoli'i had a very good garden. Lahaina Pump had one, too.

WN: So the garden was like a community garden? They didn't have it at their own individual houses?

AV: No. It was an area given. But when people went to develop the area, just like everybody knew whose section it was, although it was a community, big garden. But everybody knew, "Oh, this was Anthony's section." And the next guy had his section. Everybody had a plot like, to grow. And people respected everybody's plot. We have no trouble. Even, you know, you raise squash and the squash went into the next guy's section, he would tell you, "Hey, you get one squash over there." (WN chuckles.) Nowadays they steal it from you. No, but those days, everybody respect each other. And everybody shared with each other, too. If you raise a certain kind of vegetables, and if mine was ready to harvest and yours wasn't or you don't have that, we would give them some and take some for us. And when they harvest whatever they grow, they give us some and we give them some. It was a very good relationship going on. And everybody respected each other. Nobody stole from the next guy.

WN: What if you had extra?

AV: Well, as I say, we shared with everybody else who raises. And many times, I would raise maybe lettuce, the guy would raise maybe *won bok* cabbage or something like that. So when mine was ready, and his wasn't ready, I would give him some of mine. When his was ready, he would give me some of his. So even though we don't communicate with each other when we planting, we watching the next guy, what he plants, and we try to plant something different so that we can exchange.

WN: I've never heard that, you know, having more like a community kind of a—I always thought everybody had their own in their own yard.

AV: Pu'ukoli'i was a big community garden, too. Lahaina Pump had one.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

AV: You know, maybe there were times when the plantation people were not well-off. But in my time, and as I say I was born in 1926, and all through that time until I retired from Pioneer Mill, I was very satisfied with the way things were going. I mean you know, I heard many, many stories of how some of the plantation workers were treated before by different bosses and stuff. But my time, as I said, from, if I was born in 1926, maybe twenty years or fifteen years after that, from that time on, plantation was very good as far as I'm concerned. And as I say, I've heard of different stories when people said that the bosses were really bad and rough to the people and whatnot. But in my time, the bosses were very good. And as I said, time has changed from that time maybe from the beginning till when I was growing up. But when I was working for Pioneer Mill, the bosses was easy to talk to. Many times I've heard stories that you couldn't talk to the bosses, the bosses just refuse to talk to people, and they were real rough to people. But my time, maybe because of the modern technology, I mean you know the modern times, different bosses. But in my time working for Pioneer Mill, we had very good bosses.

WN: This was when you were working in the 1950s?

AV: Yeah.

WN: How about when you were going to school? Did you work on the plantation? How was that?

AV: Yeah. Was okay. Good. All the time, as I say, when I was working, the bosses were really good. But I've heard, as I say, lot of stories of how the bosses treated the labor before. And it never happened to me. And at that time, maybe times have changed, the bosses changed. But we had very good relationship with the bosses. I enjoyed working for Pioneer Mill. And as I say, if you wanted to learn something, to me, that was a place to learn. If there was anything you wanted to learn, it was available to learn. I mean, you know, you wanted to be a mechanic, you could learn to be a mechanic. You want to be a machinist, you learn to be a machinist. And cultivation. I mean, there's so many things. The plantation had a wide selection of things: plumbing, electrician. So maybe if you interview somebody who was maybe twenty years older than I am, maybe they would have something different to tell you. But in my opinion, they [i.e., the plantation] have been very good to me. And I've enjoyed working for them. The only reason why I left was, it was getting too unionized. In other words, they're [i.e., union] telling you what to do, how to do it, and whatnot. And I thought that I wouldn't like to be controlled like that. So I decided to leave the plantation, but I credit the plantation for training me and giving me the opportunity to learn what I've learned from them.

WN: When you said "too unionized," what do you mean? Too rigid personnel-wise?

AV: Well, they weren't letting you work the way you wanted to work. I was a truck driver and if you made more trips than the next guy, they would come and see. They'd tell you that, "Hey, you making the other guys look bad so cut down on your trips." You know, stuff like that.

And I was getting problems with them too in a sense where I was supporting Hannibal Tavares [for Maui County mayor], who was a Republican and the union was Democratic.

And we had controversies in the beginning. And after a while they respected me for what I stood for. In fact, the leaders themselves complimented me on that, for standing up.

WN: Well, Hannibal Tavares got some union support.

AV: Yeah. He got . . .

WN: He was [a former] A&B [Alexander & Baldwin executive] and . . .

AV: Yeah. But he got endorsed by the union.

WN: Right.

AV: But in the beginning, it wasn't like that.

WN: I see.

AV: But as I said, I never regretted working for Pioneer Mill. And I only wish, if they were still available, the younger workers would get to be able to work for them, so that they may be able to have a diversified field. If they wanted to learn anything within the plantation, you was able to learn it. I mean, you know, plumbing, electrician, [etc.] And I think the only thing, it's up to the individual if you want to learn and you want to advance yourself, you would put yourself in the positions. Just like, as I say, I was a truck driver. The only time that we were required to go with your truck to the garage to repair is when your truck went into repair. Off-season, now, I'm talking about. And the primary purpose of having you go with your truck to repair with the mechanic, so that you learn more about what the system or how the truck operates so that you'd be better equipped to handle your truck and you know what's wrong and what's not wrong. And besides that, you can apply anyplace you want. You want to work in the mill, there's welding, there's electrical work, there's everything you can think of in the mill. And there's carpenter shop, there's tractor shop, mechanical shop. You name it, the plantation had. Every field that you want to learn. And sometimes it depends on the individual, too. If you like to learn, you got to accept some of the conditions. When you're learning, the journeymen, sometimes, they not so friendly. So if you humble yourself, you get to like them, they like you, and then you can learn more. But sometimes when you doing a mistake or don't like take orders and stuff like that, sometimes you deprive yourself of learning little bit more.

WN: Well, you learned a lot from working on the plantation. Tell me what was your first job on the plantation. I mean, when you started even as a kid.

AV: When I first worked for the plantation, they hired us school kids. We used to go after school and Saturdays, weeding. Weeding in the fields. They never had the chemicals that they could control the weeds so they hired us. I mean they hired all these kids for weeding. We used to go weeding. And from then on . . .

WN: Weeding with the hoe?

AV: Weeding with the hoe.

WN: *Hō hana?*

AV: *Hō hana.* Yeah. And as I said, as time went by, they selected—I guess the *lunas* who were responsible for the weeders, they were instructed to watch for the good personnel.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

So as I said, they selected the few good ones. And eventually I was one sort of a supervisor for the summer school kids. And after school we used to have a workforce mostly of girls, picking up cane along the main trackway. I mean, when the cane fall down all along the track line, we used to pick up all the cane and stuff like that. So eventually time went by, I start getting little different chores. I was a supervisor for the seed-cutting crew.

WN: So this was when you were still going school?

AV: Yeah.

WN: You became supervisor?

AV: Yeah.

WN: Wow.

AV: I mean temporary supervisor, they call it. And I was blessed in a sense where I've been really helped. And then as I told you in the beginning, I was supposed to be a supervisor with the seed cutters, the old ladies cutting seed. Seed is, we call it *pulapula*, but it's the small cane that they cut to replant the fields.

WN: About one foot long?

AV: Yeah. About one foot long. And the reason why I didn't go along with that was, I was concerned about making money. I was having a family and I wanted . . .

WN: This is not during when you were going school then? This is afterwards?

AV: This is afterwards. In 1948 I got married. And afterwards I wanted to become a cane truck driver because the cane truck drivers was getting a dollar and forty-seven cents [\$1.47] an hour which was far more than many other kind of work at that time. And we work three shifts, which would give me an opportunity to work during the day and work in the afternoon or midnight shift. Picking up extra jobs on the outside, you know, trying to make a little bit more money. So this is why I went to harvesting.

WN: So you started out when you were a boy, part-time, you started *hō hana*. But you weren't a *luna* until you started work full-time. Or were you *luna* when you were still in high school?

AV: Yeah, I was a *luna* when I was still going school.

WN: Oh, okay.

AV: And then as I said, afterwards when I became a permanent worker, then I was a *luna* for the seed cutters. But I thought I could make more money by driving a haul-cane truck. And because it gave me an opportunity to work on different shifts, I could change. Many workers, the regular workers who don't have any part-time work, they don't mind working only during the day. They don't like to work in the afternoon or the night. So we who like to have part-time jobs, we'd like to switch with them. In other words, they can

work during the day and we work in the afternoon or midnight for them. So we were able to do our Pioneer Mill work and then do our part-time jobs on the outside.

WN: So you went to Sacred Hearts and you went to Saint Anthony School.

AV: Yeah.

WN: Did you know what you wanted to do?

AV: Ah, no. I really wasn't concerned what I wanted to do. (Chuckles) Afterwards as I said, I went into the army and after I got out of the army, I worked at Pearl Harbor [Naval Shipyard] for a few years. I couldn't get adjusted to the traffic. I was living in Waikiki.

WN: Oh yeah? What part of Waikiki?

AV: Right next to Fort DeRussy. And if you can imagine in 1947 in comparison today, there was just like nothing in '47 compared to today, yeah? So if the traffic was bad for me, then you can imagine what it is now. After I worked a couple of years there, I told myself, "No, I gotta go back to Maui."

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay. So actually you graduated from Saint Anthony, 1944.

AV: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: You went military service for three years.

AV: Yeah.

WN: On O'ahu—I mean you were stationed?

AV: No. I went to Fort Hood, Texas.

WN: Oh, that's right.

AV: I trained in Fort Hood, Texas. Then I was shipped to Philippines before the war ended. I was in the Philippines when the war ended. And I re-enlisted a year after that in the Philippines. And then I came back to Honolulu and I worked for Pearl Harbor after that.

WN: I see. You didn't want to stay in the military?

AV: I wanted to stay, I was—Captain Moon, my commanding officer, recommended that I go to officers' training school, you know. But I was concerned about, you know, coming back. My girlfriend was still here [Lahaina] at that time, which is my wife today. And then when I came back to Hawai'i, I was working in Pearl Harbor. She was there for a while. She graduated. She was going to Lahainaluna and then the last year or two years, she went to Roosevelt [High School]. And she graduated Roosevelt. But anyway, after she graduated, she came back to Maui and I was still in Honolulu. And I just couldn't,

you know, I started seven o'clock in the morning, I leave home at six or five-thirty. And I get through at three in the afternoon or three-thirty, something like that, and I don't get home till five, six o'clock in the evening. And don't make sense to me. On Maui I know for sure that I was going Saint Anthony's School and in half an hour, I'm in Lahaina. (Chuckles.)

WN: Oh, Kahului to . . .

AV: I'm from Lahaina. Yeah, back to Lahaina, you know. So anyway I came back and I went back to Pioneer Mill. And Pioneer Mill was happy to get me back.

WN: This is in 1950?

AV: Yeah.

WN: What did you do at Pearl Harbor?

AV: I was an inventory clerk, which is reconciler and adjuster for Pearl Harbor. And I enjoyed the work. We went from all the different areas of Pearl Harbor. Not only Pearl Harbor, Schofield [Barracks], wherever they had supplies. We count the stock. The job was good, no problem. But I just couldn't cope with taggling on my work, you know, you work eight-hour shift and you take twelve hours to get to work and come back. It don't make sense, yeah? In comparison, I was so used to Lahaina and Maui. Maui was so easygoing. And if I were to talk to somebody who lived in Honolulu now in comparison to when I used to live there in the [19]40s, they would laugh at me when I said so much traffic, you know . . .

WN: That's right. (Chuckles.)

AV: . . . in comparison. But that's the way it is. And I'm glad I did. I came home and I worked for Pioneer Mill. I got married and . . .

WN: Was there a big difference in pay between Pioneer Mill pay and Pearl Harbor?

AV: Ah, maybe Pearl Harbor was little higher in pay, but it was a difference of maybe four, five years difference, yeah. So if I was here at that time, maybe Pioneer Mill would pay me higher than I was getting, you know, in comparison, yeah?

WN: Right.

AV: Whatever you make four or five years ago in comparison to today, you know what I mean, the scale got higher and higher each time, so. But sometimes when you raising a family, the pay has a lot to do with it. And yet enjoyment and feeling at ease where you work is a lot of difference in comparison to money, too, yeah. So if you can enjoy life here [Lahaina] making less money, it would be better than making a lot more money down there [Honolulu] and still not enjoying it, yeah?

WN: Yeah. So when you came back here in 1950, you were married already?

AV: Yeah. I got married in 1948.

WN: Where did you live?

AV: At first I lived with my mother at Lunaville. My mother was still in the Lunaville house. And then we moved with my mother-in-law, my father-in-law, who was working for Pioneer Mill.

WN: What was his name?

AV: George Chung. George Chung was my father-in-law.

WN: C-H-U-N-G?

AV: C-H-U-N-G.

WN: So your wife's name was Gertrude Chung?

AV: Gertrude Chung, yeah.

WN: Okay.

AV: And as I said, I was working for Pioneer Mill, and there was a house close to my father-in-law's place that Pioneer Mill had a lease on it. They didn't own the house, but they had a lease on it. And Kam Chew Young, who was the proprietor of Yet Lung Store, through him I found out that this house was leased to Pioneer Mill. So I went to see Pioneer Mill, and they were all very helpful to me. And after I applied for it, within a month or so, I got the house. And I moved into that house. I was renting just like from Pioneer Mill because Pioneer Mill, they didn't own the house but they had the lease. Fifty-year lease on that house anyway. It was along the coastline, right down here. And I lived in the house and raised my two kids, I think, over there. And then I bought this place.

WN: When did you buy this place?

AV: In nineteen fifty. . . . I think '52 or '53, I bought this place. And after building it, then I moved here and raised the rest of my family here. And as I said, I was still working for Pioneer Mill and then I joined the state.

WN: Before we get into that, how did you learn to drive a truck?

AV: (Chuckles.) Well, we all learned how to drive all kind of vehicles when you're on a plantation, you know, yeah.

WN: So this is a cane-haul truck?

AV: Cane-haul truck. To tell you the truth, I was one of the first few. Pioneer Mill was turning over from railroad, from the train to the trucking. And the original, the first trucks they had was the six-by-six military trucks which we had in the military. And they converted those military trucks with boxes and we were hauling cane with those military trucks. And as time went by, they experimented in loading those trucks, how to make the—and they had substations to unload the cane in the cars. And then later on, they eventually changed over into Kenworth, bigger trucks and whatnot. So we were driving the six-by-six military trucks, haul-cane trucks. And we had a truck and a trailer, so just like two boxes. And then they converted into the Kenworth, the truck itself had two boxes and the trailer had two more boxes. So we hauled four boxes in comparison to the military, two boxes. So that's how we got into the system of—in other words we started very slowly

with the different trucks. In fact, even the labor trucks they converted into making boxes on top to haul the cane. Experimental kind, eh. But most of the trucks they first started with was military. And those days, after the war, they could buy the military vehicles cheap, so they were buying all of 'em.

WN: Before the war it was still train?

AV: Yeah. They were loading it on cane cars, and the train used to take it to the mill and they unload it like that. And then when we came back after the war, they started to eliminate the train cars. But they didn't eliminate it completely. Every shift had two different supervisors. One head supervisor was in charge of both, but one was a lower supervisor and one was a higher supervisor. But the difference was, one operation was close to the mill and one was farther from the mill. So that in case the mill ran out of cane, the harvesting crew that was working close to the mill could supply the mill faster, and the one farther away could come in slower. So all our supervisors, like even our bosses, Higuchi was our head boss, and the other supervisor was Takahashi. "Choppy" Takahashi they call him.

WN: This Higuchi, is that James?

AV: No, Samuel.

WN: Samuel.

AV: Sam. And then the next supervisor George Andrade with "Swipe" Nakamura. And then the other one was Hiromi Omura and. . . I forget his name now. But anyway, they had two supervisors with two sections. In other words, one section they harvest close to the mill and one section was farther away from the mill. And when we went down, the farther section from the mill had the priority to unload faster because they take longer to go way out and get the cane. And then the ones close by, they can supply the mill. It worked out real good.

WN: So did you notice them taking out the tracks and building or putting together the cane-haul roads . . .

AV: Yeah.

WN: . . . for the trucks?

AV: Yeah. In fact right in front here used to be a railroad track, and they took out the railroad track, and put haul-cane truck road. I used to stop here and pick up my kids and take 'em out with me when I'm working on the midnight shift. (Laughs) And that's illegal, yeah? (WN laughs.) But the kids always say, "Daddy, take us on the truck." Because I pass right in front the house, easy, yeah?

But as I said, I have no regrets in working for Pioneer Mill. And as I said, I've learned a lot from them. Even out in the field, they show you how to use a pick, they show you how to use a cane knife, a sickle, and you know how to sharpen it. Everything you want to learn, you can learn. I went in the mill, I went in the garage, I went in every place you can think of. And there was so much to learn. One year I worked in the machine shop, helping the machinist, which was very knowledgeable. And as I said after that, mostly the electrician in the mill, going all through the different big motors that they have, cleaning 'em up, taking them apart. And when I talk about motors, not these small little motors.

You know, these big, huge motors. We used to go down to the pumps, go down two, three hundred feet down in the shafts, and take off the motors, clean 'em up, get 'em ready for the next shift.

WN: This was when you were working as a truck driver?

AV: As a truck driver, off season.

WN: Oh, off season.

AV: Off season we went to different places. And even certain off seasons, we used to clean the different—we call 'em rivers but actually that's streams all along every section; Kaua'ula, Launiupoko, Lahainaluna. All the gulches like that, we use to clean that. Pioneer Mill used to take care of that because when it rains and stuff like that, it helps them if the water can drain properly. And every year we used to go to the different intakes up here: Wahikuli, Kelaweia, all those places. And, you know, the things that you learn going into these different places, you never would get it no place else but through the companies, yeah. All the different intakes, as I say, Pioneer Mill, because they had the water sources coming in from all of these mountain areas, they used to maintain all these ditches. And when we were off season, then we went up. They use to use all the harvesting crew, go up and do all these different—which was very interesting. I mean, you know, many a times without going with the proper leadership and showing you where to go and how to go, you wouldn't be able to reach all these other places. And we were able to go through that. And as I said, I never regretted it. To me it was a great advance in my life, learning all these different things.

WN: You were there until '61?

AV: Yeah. Sixty-one I moved into the state.

WN: So during the harvesting and everything, you were driving the cane truck. Was it like a dump truck?

AV: No. In other words, it's a huge truck with chains inside. And on the side of the truck, they had a long metal, where the chains were attached to. And we used to go down to the mill and they had a crane that pushes, they had fingers like and lifting up all these chains and dump the cane into the carriers like this. And of course, in the beginning it wasn't like that. When they first had the military trucks, you know, we had small little boxes and they used to unload it differently. But as time went by, they could unload two boxes at a time.

(Buzzing sound in background.)

WN: And they would be loaded on with a cane grabber? Cane grabber would grab the cane from the ground, and load it in the cane truck?

AV: Right.

WN: And then when you go to the mill, same thing?

AV: Same thing.

WN: Unload it.

AV: Unload it like that.

WN: I see.

AV: And of course, there's when you say these things, it's just a matter of a few words. But the experimental things that happened to the plantation like when they first start in the hauling by truck, they used to have people cutting the cane and put in the cars. Then when they started to grab it with the crane, then they found out that the variety of cane they had was too brittle, it started to break in small little pieces, so there's so much left in the fields. And so they experimented in the different crops, in the different varieties of cane. They wanted a variety that could be easily grabbed, could be squeezed but not breaking. And it took years to come up with a crop that they could grab without breaking apart. You know what I mean.

WN: When they were grabbing it, it was still [growing] in the ground or they cut it?

AV: In the ground.

WN: They didn't cut it anymore?

AV: No.

WN: So that by that time, they were . . .

AV: Well, they had a tractor with one sharp little, what they call a rake. They used to rake the cane over there. But when they do that, they rake up all the stones and the dirt and everything, and they root up all the cane. So then they found out that it's better if they just grabbed it. And when it grabs, it breaks off close to the ground.

WN: I see.

AV: And if it's not close to the ground, then they have a few women—they had some men, too, but mostly women—that follows the crane and cut and throw. You know what I mean is . . .

WN: In the path of the . . .

AV: . . . in the path of the crane. But what was happening, the first beginning, the variety was so soft that when the crane grabs it, it breaks off in small little pieces. And then they found a variety that could stand this without breaking. So those are the things that HSPA [Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association] used to do all of those experimenting and whatnot.

WN: But they were still burning, yeah?

AV: They were still burning.

WN: They were burning. So it wasn't grabbing up green leaves, yeah?

AV: No. They were still burning.

WN: Right, right.

- AV: Anyway, as I say, maybe somebody else get different opinions about sugar companies but when I grew up, I was very lucky and I would recommend this to anybody. The only unfortunate thing is, now they're not here. They're not available for. . . .
- WN: Well, that's interesting that by the time you were harvesting, which is in the [19]50s, they were just burning the cane and then just grabbing 'em up from off the ground, putting it on the truck, drive the truck to the mill, and unloading.
- AV: Unloading.
- WN: So really your job was strictly to drive?
- AV: Drive. When we first started, we had two substations. One in Launiupoko, just before the Launiupoko Park, and one out here just before Māhinahina, where the trucks used to get the cane from on top and bring down there and they unloaded it. But after a while they discontinued that and they came directly to the mill. I think they had it down pat good enough to eliminate the substations. The substations was primarily to save time for the trucks to travel all the way here. But I guess afterwards they found out they had enough experience or enough trucks to feed the mill.
- WN: Now when you were up there driving, did you ever make the wrong turn or get lost up there or anything like that? Oh, 'cause you were going midnight shift, right? Late-night shift. Was it easy to find your way back down?
- AV: There was a lot of drivers who went the wrong way, too. (WN chuckles.) Like out here, Kā'anapali when you come down from Māhinahina, where the airport is, when you come down. You know where the stoplight is? I don't know, you not too familiar with Lahaina, but anyway, there's a haul-cane road right above that. You supposed to turn on the haul-cane road, but many people went down all the way to the government road and they start going on Honokōwai Road. And most of the time when that happens, you have several different things happen to you. The cane trucks are high and with the cane sticking up, most of the time you break all the telephone wires. So it's a costly thing when you go down there. And sometimes even though you like to avoid or run away from that, if you can come back up onto one haul-cane road without the bosses knowing then it's all right. But most of the time they'll find out because your trucks stops down there. (WN chuckles.) Many times we turn over. The roads are slanted, the operator don't cut the road the proper way, and then the guy who loading you sometimes they load it all one side and the truck tilts like this. But all in all it's. . . .
- WN: You mean the truck would actually fall down? Did that ever happen to you?
- AV: Mm-hmm [yes].
- WN: What do you do?
- AV: Not my truck, but my trailer.
- WN: Oh, your trailer.
- AV: And I try to have caution. I coming down and I can feel myself on the truck like this, you know. And normally you should be like this. And I just stop there. Normally the supervisor is on the top of where we harvesting and he can watch everything that's going on. And if the crane stops or the truck stops for a few minutes and not moving, he'll rush

down right away unless he's sleeping. And if he's sleeping then you can stay there one hour or two hours. He don't come around. But anyway, several times that happened to me. I stopped. And he comes down, Yabu, we used to call him "Yabu," Higuchi, Samuel Higuchi. "What's wrong Tony?"

I said, "This truck going turn over, I think."

"Nah."

"Come, come, come."

"Okay. Never mind, wait."

(WN laughs.) Then he gotta call the crane to come and lift it up. And it's a big problem. Most of our areas are steep hills. And when we coming down like this, when you turn to go off the field, you know, if the road could be cut level then your truck, when you turn, your truck is level. But when you turn like this, the truck is like this. Oh, boy. But that's the biggest trouble. But you know in all fairness, "Bunt" Baldwin, the number two boss over here, very good man. Every time when I'm on shift, especially the two o'clock shift, he'll bring his son for me to take, go up usually when we up Lahainaluna, below the L over there. That's a steep place. And he always used to bring his son for ride the truck. And I never felt too good, but I felt honored because he trusted the son with me.

(Laughter)

So in that sense I feel good. But, oh, you know *da kine* places, tsk, can never tell boy, you know. Sometimes when the crane loads you, there's a lot of cane fall down on the road. And when you start going down, the truck presses that cane and all the juice come out and the truck just slides, sometimes twenty, thirty feet. Just like you on skis, you know. And if you're not sure of yourself, you don't know what the hell to do, you know. But as I said, through experience you know what's gonna happen. So fortunate that nothing had really happened. But I mean, we had pretty close calls sometimes.

WN: Okay, well, I wanted to ask you a few more questions.

AV: Okay.

WN: How did you feel when Pioneer Mill announced that they were gonna close?

AV: Well, I didn't feel too bad about it because I wasn't connected with Pioneer Mill anymore. However, I was very sad in a sense where I didn't feel that nobody would be taking care of all the drainage and the different things that the company used to do without anybody knowing. Like keeping up all these intakes and keeping up all these—we call that "rivers" but actually they're streams coming down from the mountain and stuff like that. When the company was in operation, they took care of everything to protect their crops and stuff like that. And now that they not protecting their crops, who's going to be responsible for it [i.e., the land]? Is the state gonna be responsible? We had a lot of land leased from Baldwin Packers, especially out this end. You know, they were raising sugarcane. But Baldwin Packers, Kamehameha Schools [Bishop Estate]. Who's responsible to take care of this land now?

WN: Well, what's gonna happen to all this land?

AV: Just like recently they had a fire up Lahainaluna, yeah? Above the *L*. Now if plantation was raising cane, I don't think that would have happened. And if it would happen, they had all the equipment available. In no time they could get tractors and stuff like that up there. And now they don't have nothing. So the land is still available. I don't know if you familiar, but if you gauge yourself from here to Wailuku, especially in the Olowalu area, all that dry cane land above the road, there's a lot of big kind trees growing in between the cane field. And after a while, that's going be a fire hazard, eh. Who's going to be responsible for that? In the Olowalu area, not too bad, because I understand somebody bought it, yeah? A fellow by the name of [Peter] Martin or something.

WN: Oh, yeah.

AV: And they're developing the lower section, but they bought all of the top sections. So they're responsible, so. But those areas that nobody bought, who's responsible for that? You know, that's the sad thing about it. And if you read the newspapers now, you see everybody still complaining about HC&S burning the sugarcane and, you know, polluting the air and whatnot. I would hate to see HC&S go out of business, too. Although it doesn't affect me. But, you know, when you fly on the airplane and you look, there's cane fields and green patches, beautiful, yeah?

WN: Yeah.

AV: And when you don't see nothing like that, all dry land like over here, it's a sad situation.

WN: Do you think some day it will be private ownership? You know, Amfac's gonna sell this land and people gonna buy and build some houses, with the nice view.

AV: I think it's possible. However, I think they're gonna be very reluctant to build because of the water situation, yeah?

WN: Oh.

AV: You know what I mean? So it'll be just dead land if nobody—maybe agriculture, some agriculture. But without the water . . .

WN: So there isn't water over here?

AV: Well, there's water but everybody owns the rights of the water, so far yet. So just like Pioneer Mill now they closed, but I don't know what conditions they have with the water that they have. And some of the water that they used to have before maybe not legally. So it's easy to do anything if you have all the water. But without the water, you cannot develop, yeah? And I don't know, plantation, they used to provide so many people with jobs. Of course when they in business, everybody complains and grumbles. And when they're out of business, everybody still complains and grumbles and everything else.

WN: So what do you see the future of Lahaina to be, say, in forty, fifty years? I mean, you know, it doesn't matter for all of us but . . .

AV: Oh, boy. I thinking of Lahaina as [becoming] one place just like Honolulu, I think. I mean, just homes and houses and stuff like that. Would be so good if they could develop some agricultural purposes. But agricultural purpose without water, it's another problem. And I don't know, even going to Wailuku there, Wailuku Sugar [Company] has this property just before you get to the golf course, in Waikapū. And there's a few farmers in

there raising few stuff above Mā'alaea and stuff like that, but not enough to get excited about. And I think water is their biggest problem, too. And you know right below is that ocean, Mā'alaea. . . . What do you call that now?

WN: The harbor, [small] boat harbor?

AV: No, above the boat harbor. That new Mā'alaea. . . . Where they have all that tanks with the fish.

WN: Oh, the aquarium?

AV: Aquarium. Yeah, you know, all above there.

WN: What about the Pioneer Mill and the mill itself? What are your feelings about what they should do with it?

AV: Just a few days ago, they had a big fire in there doing big damage. I think they should do away with it. And everybody said that the stack should remain for historical purpose. But nobody realizes how much it costs to keep that thing. You know, the stack looks small from in here, but if we went in there, you know, it's from here to my house the distance [i.e., diameter] inside. And there's . . .

WN: That's about, oh, thirty feet?

AV: Thirty feet easy.

WN: Thirty feet in . . .

AV: The diameter. Yeah. And there's cement blocks inside. We used to go up there and clean that up inside, too.

WN: How did you get up there?

AV: Inside get just like.

WN: Oh, yeah?

AV: Yeah. But it's deteriorating and the company telling them that it's gonna cost something like \$200,000 to restore it. But the \$200,000 is to restore it only for another few years. So are we gonna keep on paying \$200,000 to keep that up? I don't think it's worth it. And everybody claims that, you know, you out in a boat, you going see that [as a landmark] all the time. But we all lose sight of many, many other things in life. I think something that maybe the *L* like up Lahainaluna, when you out here, you can see the *L*. I think that's more, you know what I mean is, not so costly like this mill, like that, yeah. So that's my opinion.

WN: Well, people think they want to keep it because it's like a landmark, yeah.

AV: Yeah. But if they do away with it, they can use that property. And as I said, now, with the fire in the mill, I don't know what kind of damages they have inside the mill. Although it's a nice landmark, but if it's a costly landmark I don't think it's worth it to keep it up like that. Like because, how many of us are fishermen? The only people who really complaining—I mean not complaining but who really want to save it is the historians and

the people who go out fishing. They say when they come close to Maui, they can see the smokestack. But other than that the people right in Lahaina town, they don't even see the smokestack. You in Lahaina town, you don't see the smokestack. You know, that's too close to you, yeah?

WN: Okay. I think we're done.

AV: We're done?

WN: Yeah. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

PIONEER MILL COMPANY:

A Maui Sugar Plantation Legacy

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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